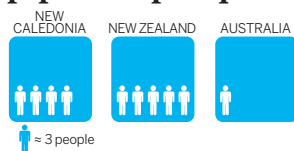




population per sq km



New Caledonia Today

Culture

There is a huge cultural divide between New Caledonia's Kanak and Caldoche (locally born descendants of Europeans) populations. In many ways, it's as if they are living in entirely different countries. Kanaks suffered terribly after the arrival of the Europeans in the 19th century, and it seems the cuts still run deep. As well as the decimation of the Kanaks after exposure to new diseases in the 1800s, many were forced to leave their traditional lands to make way for European settlers. The brutal treatment of the Kanaks by their colonisers, which continued into the 20th century, has made it difficult for many to move on.

The European presence ensures that today New Caledonia has good roads, quality infrastructure and 24/7 electricity – all things that its independent neighbour Vanuatu cannot claim. Noumea has a sophisticated air, with glitz and glam by the yacht-sprinkled waterfront, but it's not Kanaks lying back sipping champagne. As well as a cultural gap, there is an obvious financial gap. Young Kanaks are overrepresented in jail and their unemployment rate is four times higher than youths descended from Europeans. Only time will tell whether independence from France will help these two cultures move on from the past.

Political Climate

France's President is New Caledonia's chief of state. Elections held in New Caledonia in 2009 resulted in pro-French parties winning more seats (31) than pro-independence parties (23). The President of the Government, Harold Martin, is the leader of 'Future Together', a loyalist anti-independence party.

The Noumea Accord of 1998 outlines a power-sharing arrangement and aims for the gradual transfer of power from France to the govern-

» Total area of New Caledonia: 18,575 sq km

» Area that is land: 18,275 sq km

» Arable land: 0.32%

» Number of tourists in 2010: 100,000

» GDP growth: N/A

» Unemployment: 17.1%

Dos & Don'ts

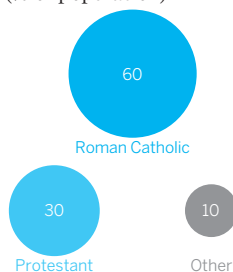
Do Try to find the chief's traditional hut on first entering a *tribu* (clan community) – it's usually near the tribe's school or church. Ask here for permission to see the local sights and travel on the tribe's land.

Don't Take photos without first asking permission

Do Try to learn a bit of French before arriving. You'll find that English is spoken in Noumea; however, it's rarely spoken outside Noumea, on the Loyalty Islands or on Île des Pins.

belief systems

(% of population)



if New Caledonia were 100 people



44 would be Melanesian (Kanak)
34 would be European
9 would be Wallisian & Futunian
13 would be other

ment of New Caledonia, culminating in a referendum after 2014 to decide if further powers should be handed over. The congress is already in charge of taxation, foreign trade, labour law, health and hygiene.

The Accord also encourages the building of a united destiny through the selection of symbols of national identity such as a new flag. Loyalists did not want to lose the French tricolour, however, so in July 2010 the Kanak flag was also adopted. This makes Vanuatu one of few countries with two official flags. There are questions about whether this does more to reinforce the divisions between the two cultures than it does to bring them together.

Resources

Having its lagoon listed as a Unesco World Heritage site in 2008 was a moment of pride for New Caledonia, but with the lagoon's listing came the huge responsibility to protect it. This is easier said than done when nickel mining provides most of the country's income.

Despite providing employment and income, nickel mining causes the loss of huge swaths of vegetation and dramatic landscape changes. The surrounding air, rivers and heritage-listed lagoon are at risk from the by-products of mining – in 2009 sulphuric acid leaked into a river that flows into a Unesco World Heritage buffer zone, killing around 3000 fish.

Kanak communities have fought the mines, citing concerns about their environmental and cultural impact. In 2006 there was a violent confrontation when local Kanak protesters tried to halt construction of a new nickel plant. Eventually, local leaders signed an agreement stipulating that the plant's owner would provide funding for reforestation and community development projects. Although not supported by everyone, the promise of employment opportunities for local Kanaks was a strong persuader.

- » Population: 260,200
- » Population growth: 1.5%
- » Migration rate: 4.18 migrants/1000 population
- » Life expectancy: male/female 72/81 years
- » Sex ratio: men/women 100/100

Kanak Hospitality Top Books

While journeying around New Caledonia you may hear comments from European descendants that belong back in the worst days of colonialism. But stay in *tribu* accommodation and experience for yourself how warm and wonderful the Kanak culture is.

The Kanak Apple Season by Déwé Gorodé is a collection of short stories about traditional aspects of Kanak life, the status of Kanak women and the struggle for Kanak emancipation.

Les Cœurs Barbelés by Claudine Jacques is a love story about the cultural differences and similarities between Kanak and Caldoche lovers.